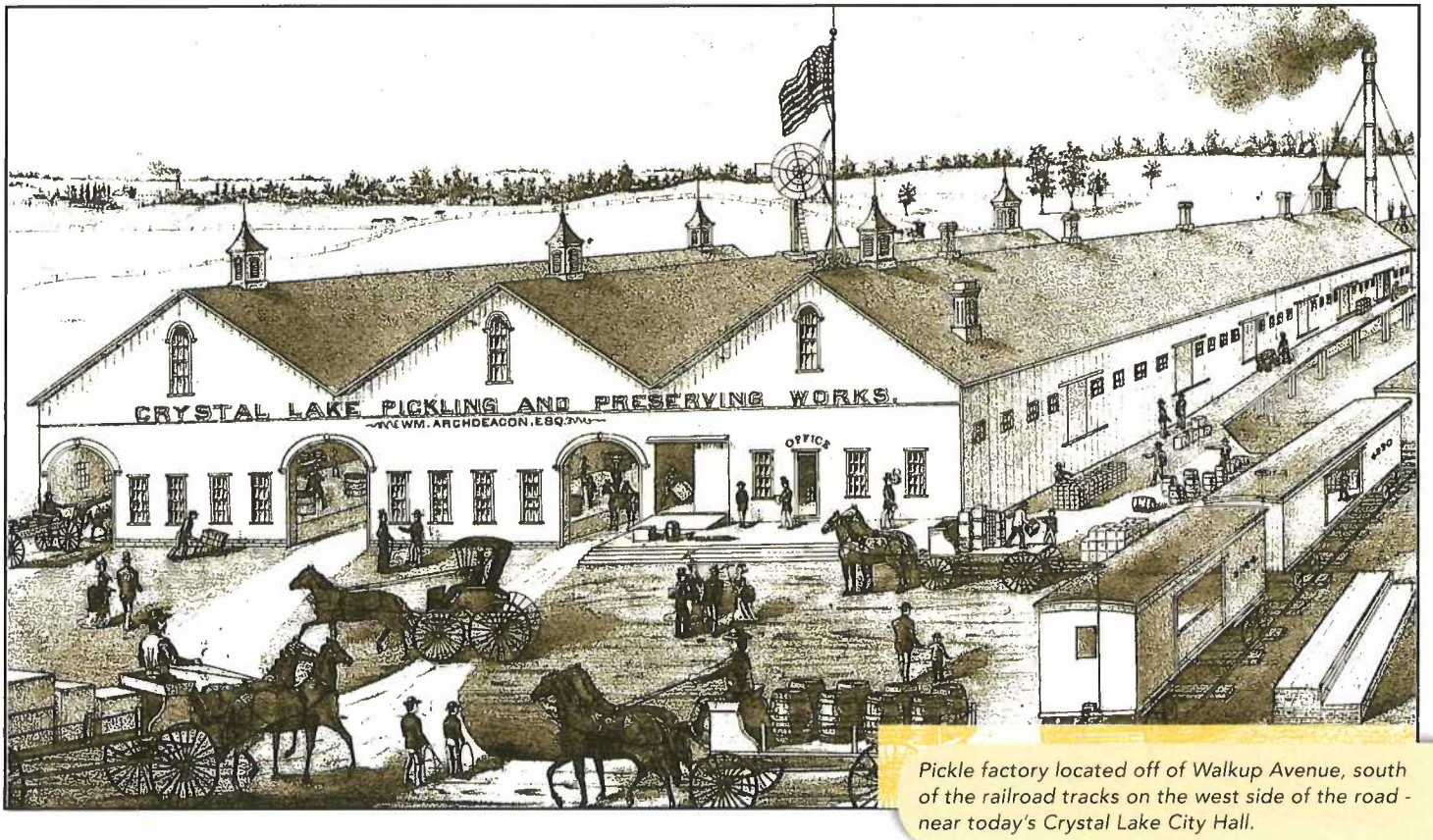
Tracer
The McHenry County Historical Society's Quarterly Magazine
ENJOYED BY OUR MEMBERS FOR 50 YEARS
2018 - VOLUME 3



Pickle factory located off of Walkup Avenue, south of the railroad tracks on the west side of the road - near today's Crystal Lake City Hall.

IN A PICKLE:

The history of McHenry County's pickle stations and canneries

By AMANDA OLSEN

We are fortunate today to still have so many active farms, growing acres upon acres of corn, soybeans, and wheat. And as evidenced by the abundance of our farmers' markets, we also are blessed with many farms still raising a variety of fruits, vegetables, and livestock.

However, farms in the early 19th century would have looked far different – awash in cucumbers, cabbage and tomatoes destined for the commercial market. During that time, the county experienced a veritable boom period of commercial pickling and canning, which encouraged extraordinary growth of these agricultural industries.

It all started in Nunda Township with the incorporation of the Crystal Lake Pickling & Canning Works in 1872. In a roundabout way, the development of the concern was in response to the Great Chicago Fire. William Archdeacon was involved in a pickle outfit in Chicago that was decimated by the fire. He elected to move his business interests north with what money he could salvage from his losses in the disaster. Along with John Walkup, they encouraged F.A. Frisbie to expand his modest pickling efforts and made significant financial investments into the fledgling Crystal Lake company.

The Crystal Lake Pickling & Canning Works was a large

Continued on page 5

The Tracer is a quarterly publication carrying local history topics, news and information for members of the McHenry County Historical Society.

Our museum is located between Routes 20 and 176, at 6422 Main Street in Union, Illinois

MAILING ADDRESS:

P.O. Box 434, Union, IL 60180

PHONE:

815-923-2267

EMAIL:

info@mchenrycountyhistory.org

WEBSITE:

www.GotHistory.org

MCHS STAFF:

Board President ..... Mary Ott
Adminstrator ..... Kurt Begalka
Office Manager ..... Nancy Roozee
Exhibit and Collection Coordinator .....Kira Halvey
Tracer Editor .....Nancy Humphrey Haskins
Volunteer & Outreach Coordinator.....Michelle Hujer

OFFICE & RESEARCH LIBRARY HOURS:

Monday through Friday - 9:00 AM to 4:30 PM

An appointment is necessary to use the research library. Non-members pay a research fee. Copies are extra.

MUSEUM HOURS:

(MAY through OCTOBER)

1 to 4 p.m. Tuesday through Friday; & Saturday, Oct. 13.

McHenry County Historical Society members enjoy FREE admission.

OUR MISSION STATEMENT:

We engage and educate current and future generations by preserving and sharing McHenry County history.

(An Illinois Not-for-profit 501c3 Corporation)

We Appreciate Our Members!

2018 Annual Report
–Mary Ott, president

Last year when I presented my annual report to the membership, I focused on change.

Change, I proposed, often can lead to growth and opportunity. I promised that the board would engage its membership and community stakeholders in its goals to create a vision for the McHenry County Historical Society and Museum, and solidify institutional goals for the 2017-18 fiscal years.

The board is happy to report that both components were identified and completed during the past year. Along with our recently updated mission statement – we engage and educate current and future generations by preserving and sharing McHenry County history – we now have a Vision Statement along with a set of Values that we will continue to use as guideposts for the growth of the organization. Keep your eye out for all three to become prominently displayed within our buildings in the near future.

During the past fiscal year, the staff was instrumental in helping the board identify two institutional goals. The two goals were to determine a long-term strategy for the future of Pringle School and complete a space analysis of our main building in Union. In the case of Pringle, consultant Beth Baranski was hired to do a thorough analysis of the 1867 one-room school. This enabled artifacts previously stored in our Schuette building to be moved and housed properly. Her results allowed the board to identify how continued restoration of Pringle should proceed and it provided us with mechanism for prioritizing restoration goals.

Beth's full report is available to anyone who is interested in reading it by visiting our research library. Administrator Kurt Begalka and Pringle task force members were instrumental in completing this institutional goal.

Our second goal of a space analysis of our main building in Union was organized and led by Kira Halvey, our exhibit and collections coordinator. The space analysis not only looked at exhibit space but also identified deficiencies in storage and work space. Recognizing the need for proper archival collection storage, paired with the board's approval to move our rotating exhibit space to the main floor to improve access, we leased off-site storage for large artifacts in the collection. This enabled artifacts previously stored in our Schuette building to be moved and housed properly. It also allowed items that had been on permanent display for more than 30 years to be placed in storage.

Additionally, Kira managed several interns during the past year who have inventoried artifacts, created detailed accession records and rehoused textiles into archival boxes. The tremendous amount of work devoted to our collection this past year is remarkable and demonstrates the commitment to preserving the artifacts entrusted to MCHS.

Along with the two intuitional goals, the board and staff also worked diligently during the past year to complete StEPs – a museum self-assessment tool created by the American Association for State and Local History. The six-part self-assessment allowed us to identify museum standard practices within our organization that we currently are meeting and

Continued on page 12

Solon Mills, off the rails but not forgotten

By CRAIG L. PFANNKUCHE

As travelers drive along modern Route 12, it is easy to overlook the small community located about two miles west of Spring Grove. As the highway crosses the Nippersink Creek, it cuts directly through the heart of what settlers in 1837 envisioned as a growing community.

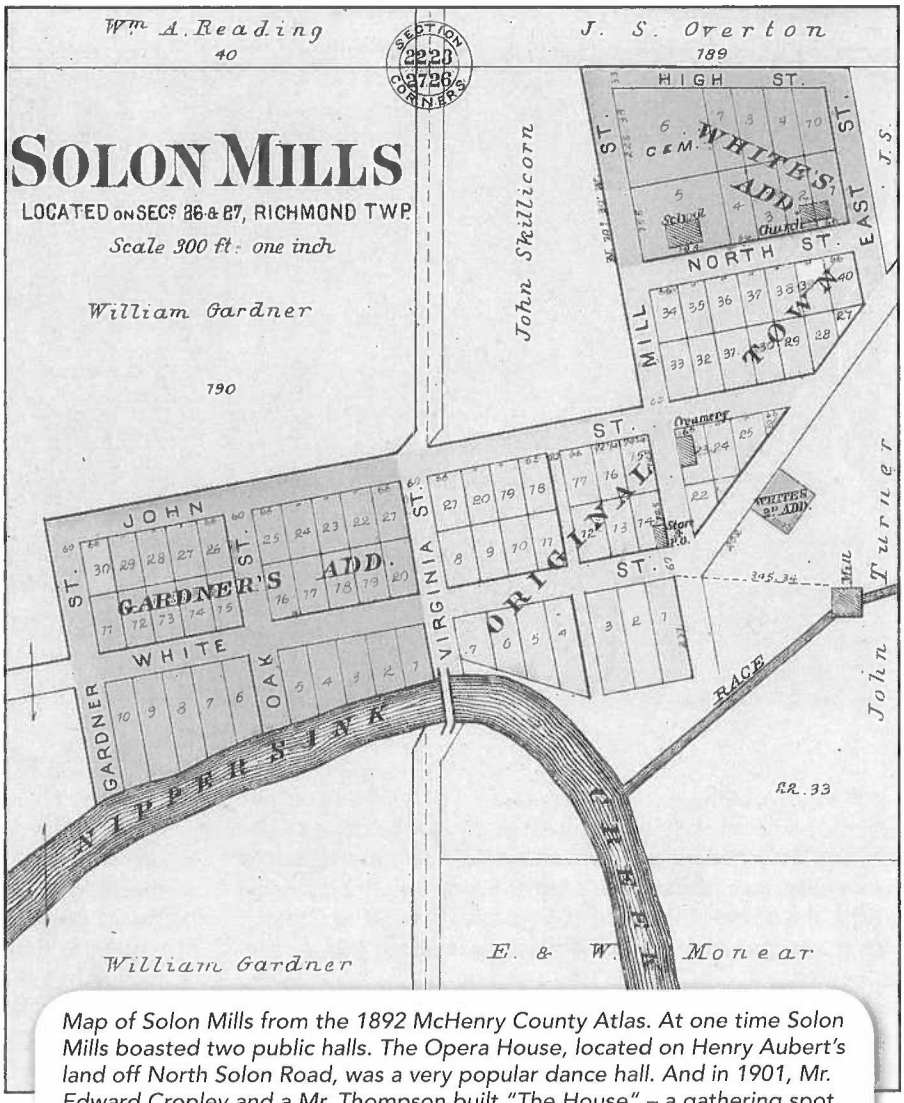
Following the end of the 1832 Blackhawk War, land-seeking settlers began entering McHenry County. Prime sites for settlement were along streams, which flowed through fertile lands with woods nearby. For a community to develop in those days, both saw and grist mills were necessary.

In the 1830s, the United States government ordered a survey of lands across northern Illinois and township maps to be drawn based on those surveys. A map for Richmond Township, made in 1839, showed a thick oak forest along the north bank of the Nippersink Creek.

In October 1837, Scottish-born (1815) William Gardner came to the area with two of his younger brothers, Alexander and David. He initially stopped in Dundee, Ill., where it is said he "assisted in building the first grist mill." William found a site along the Nippersink Creek (where sections 26 and 27 meet) to be just right for the construction of a dam and a spillway to power a sawmill. The nearby forest easily would supply the necessary timber.

A year after the Gardners began work on their millrace and mill, Henry White, a neighboring settler, saw the 1839 survey and determined that the mill actually was located on his property. Legend has it that White paid the Gardners for the mill and used it until 1841. They quickly sold the mill to White and completed the construction for White. In that year, White sold his interest in the mill to his sons, Hiram, and John W. White.

On his own property William Gardner built, as noted in the 1885 "History of McHenry County" (p. 902), the first combined saw and grist mill in the county. Using the lumber sawn by his mill, Gardner built an oak-frame house where he lived with his wife and their eight children. In 1851 they built the first brick house in the growing community which stills stands along West Solon Road.



Map of Solon Mills from the 1892 McHenry County Atlas. At one time Solon Mills boasted two public halls. The Opera House, located on Henry Aubert's land off North Solon Road, was a very popular dance hall. And in 1901, Mr. Edward Cropley and a Mr. Thompson built "The House" – a gathering spot for community events and dances.

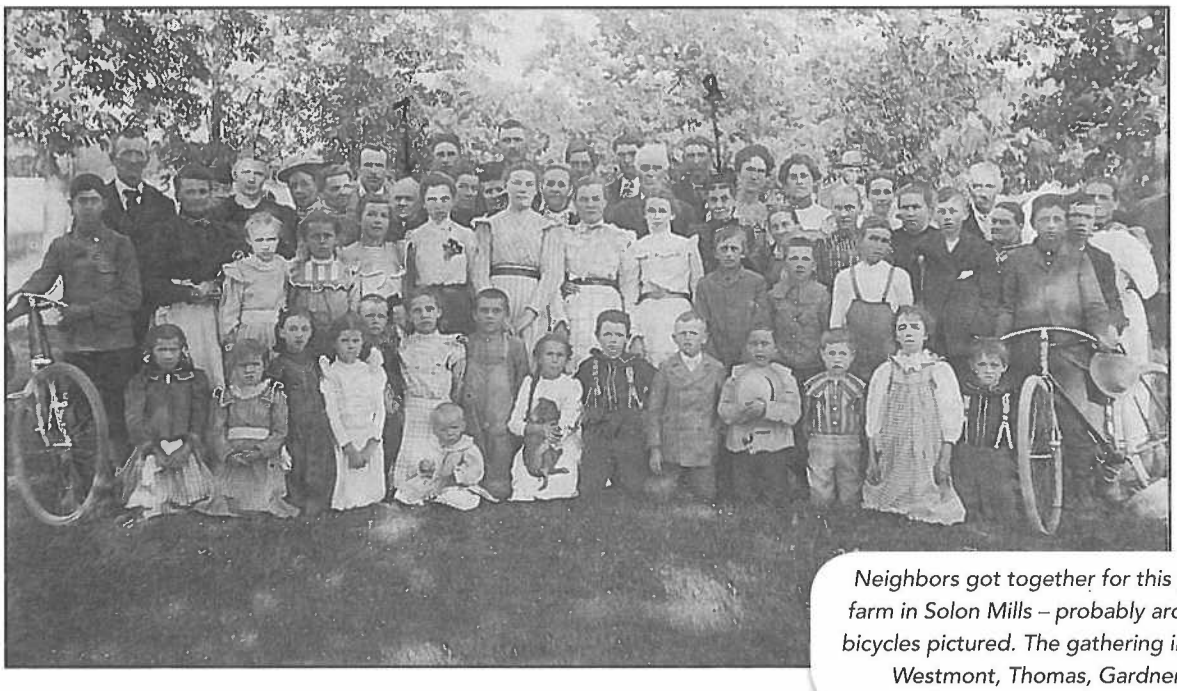
The Gardners were one of the very few families who continued to live in the community after they settled there.

William died there in November 1893 and is buried in what is called the "North Solon Cemetery" in the churchyard of the community. His wife, Ann, who died in 1889, is buried alongside him.

In 1843, a "general store" was erected in the new community. It continued as the community's central store until

Continued on page 4

Continued from page 3



Neighbors got together for this picnic at Ruebin Turner's farm in Solon Mills – probably around 1910, based on the bicycles pictured. The gathering included members of the Westmont, Thomas, Gardner and Haldeman families.

it was destroyed by fire in 1927. Also in 1843, White laid out a plat for a community to be located around the mill site. It is said that he called his plat "Solon White" in deference to his own intelligence. When White left the area and the historical record, the name of the new village was changed to Solon Mills in recognition of the multiple mills located close to the community.

Solon means a wise lawmaker or statesman.

A look at the 1850 federal census of the community shows that, besides the Gardners, only six people were listed as being non-farmers. Robert Johnson was a blacksmith. Samuel Stone set himself up as a shoemaker. Orvis Johnson styled himself as a physician while Leverett Steele described himself as a "merchant." Three small inns, providing shelter to occasional travelers, were built in the 1850s.

The 1860 federal census lists Peter Johonott as a "tinner" (maker of tin utensils) as well as being a farmer. Sylvanius Pitman was a "miller" in the community along with "J. B. Strater (?)." William Gardner and John Merrill were carpenters while D. Delaney replaced Orvis Johnson, who had moved to Woodstock in 1857, as a physician. E. Knapp represented himself as a "wagon maker."

The Johonott family remained in the Solon Mills area, mostly as farmers, although most of the pioneering members are buried in the Richmond cemetery. Carpenter William Gardner's daughter, Mary, wed fellow carpenter John Merrill. She died in 1876 while he lived on in Solon until his death in 1916. They are buried together in the "North Solon Cemetery," the original community cemetery.

The 1877 "Directory of McHenry County" lists A. E. Cole a Solon Mills blacksmith, James Corkell as a harness maker, Henry Hornby as a "farmer and cancer doctor," J. S. Overton as a "farmer and stock dealer," James Robbins as a "farmer and dealer in agricultural implements," Robert Turner as "proprietor of Solon Mills" and Isaac Watters and George Woodliffe as laborers.

The 1885 "History of McHenry County" lists (page 892) the following business people of Solon Mills: agricultural implements, James Robbins; carpenters, William Gardner, John Merrill, John Sutton; cheese manufacturer, J. S. Overton; dressmaker, Mrs, Sarah Hodge; harness maker, James Corkill; merchant, R.B. Gardner; mason, John Skillicorn; physician, Henry Hornby; restaurant, Robert Patterson.

James Robbins married Mary Aldrich in Solon during November 1856. Upon her death in 1873, she left seven bereaved children along with her husband. James, who died in Solon in 1906, is buried in the Cedarvale Cemetery with his wife. Today, the cemetery of which James Robbins was a founding member, is also known as the "South Solon Cemetery."

James Corkill, who died in Solon Mills in 1905, and John Skillicorn, who died the same year, are buried in the same plot in the "North Solon Cemetery."

Henry Hornby, the 1877 "cancer doctor," seems to have opted to farm full time by 1880. He had married Rebecca Belmer in Solon in 1857. By the 1890s, the family had moved to Egan, S.D. He died there in 1898 and is buried in the local cemetery. His wife died, probably in Des Moines, Iowa, in 1926 but her remains lie with her husband.

English-born (circa 1808) Robert Turner, the owner of the Solon Mills in 1877, married a woman named Mary Lee. She died in 1865 while he died in 1887. They lie together in the Cedarvale Cemetery.

The "Mrs. Sarah Hodge, dressmaker" listed in the 1885 history, actually was Miss Sarah Hodge. She never married. She died in Richmond in 1922 and is buried with her parents in the Cedarvale Cemetery.

In 1870, things were looking up for the little village. The local rumors heightened speculation that a railroad was to be built directly through the community from Chicago to Minneapolis. This was great news to both the community's farming and business interests.

The local mills might be able to expand into job-producing industries. The local store and restaurant might prosper because of that growth. Local farmers and stock ranchers

Continued on page 6

Continued from page 1

outfit. In addition to the main pickling building, there also was a vinegar factory to create the vinegar (from scratch) used in the pickling, and a cooper shop to create the barrels that were used in the operation. At the height of the season, which kicked off in July when the first cucumbers ripened, the firm employed up to 200 employees, which was a considerable number even by today's standards. In the first season of operation, the works handled 55,000 bushels of pickles, and an undisclosed quantity of cabbage, which was transformed into sauerkraut.

Foremost among the cucumber farmers were the Mons Petersons, who planted an average of 13 acres each season. The crop supplied the Crystal Lake pickling firm during its years of operation.

Newspaper advertisements were the primary vehicle that the pickle companies and canneries used to recruit farmers. In the early spring, canneries would advertise their interest in contracting with farmers by highlighting some of the benefits that local farmers could expect – notably a reliable payment for their crop. A Jan. 12, 1900, article in the *Marengo Union Times* lauded the Margeno town cannery as a "... good institution for our city. It pays out a large sum of money each year to gardeners and farmers, besides dispersing another large sum to men, women, boys and girls for labor."

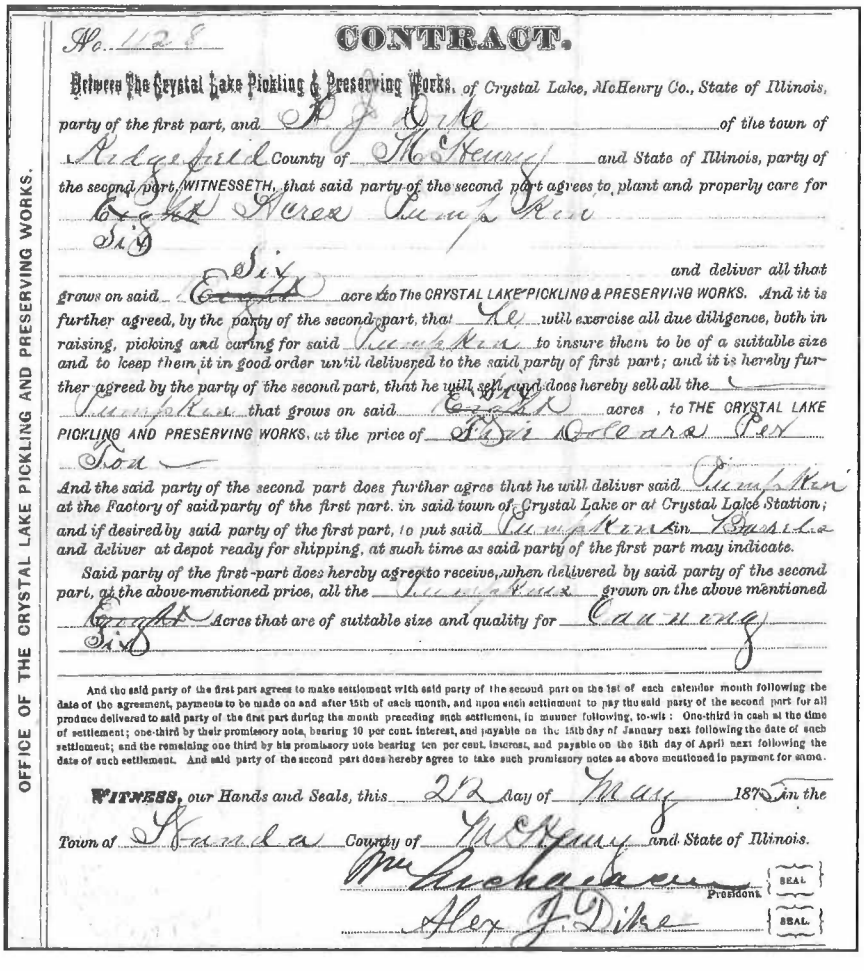
Union also made a point of celebrating it's cannery in print, by noting in the same publication on Dec. 7 of that same year:

"Such an institution is a great help to a town in furnishing employment during the packing season to quite a number of

people, besides being a help to the farmers in the vicinity... The canning factory here has in this way proved a great benefit to the town and surrounding country".

Doubtless other towns within the county shared the same sentiment.

The canneries would recommend the specific seed in their newspaper ads for contracted farmers, as well as where it could be purchased. The farmer was responsible for the initial cash outlay for seed stock. A typical arrangement would involve the farmer "subscribing" to the pickle firm or cannery by investing a sum of money in order to become a member of the grower's cooperative. In addition to providing the company an influx of cash at the beginning of the season to fund the operation, the arrangement also ensured growers a guaranteed place to have their crops accepted and processed for sale. Once the crop was converted into pickled or preserved goods and sold on the open market, the farmer then received a "pickle check" at the close of the season (typically September).


OFFICE OF THE CRYSTAL LAKE PICKLING AND PRESERVING WORKS.

No. 128

CONTRACT.

Between The Crystal Lake Pickling & Preserving Works, of Crystal Lake, McHenry Co., State of Illinois, party of the first part, and A. J. Dike of the town of Ridgefield County of McHenry and State of Illinois, party of the second part, WITNESSETH, that said party of the second part agrees to plant and properly care for Six Acres Cucumbers

and deliver all that grows on said Six acres to The CRYSTAL LAKE PICKLING & PRESERVING WORKS. And it is further agreed, by the party of the second part, that he will exercise all due diligence, both in raising, picking and caring for said Cucumbers to insure them to be of a suitable size and to keep them in good order until delivered to the said party of first part; and it is hereby further agreed by the party of the second part, that he will sell, and does hereby sell all the Cucumbers that grows on said Six acres, to THE CRYSTAL LAKE PICKLING AND PRESERVING WORKS, at the price of Four Dollars per Ton

And the said party of the second part does further agree that he will deliver said Cucumbers at the Factory of said party of the first part, in said town of Crystal Lake or at Crystal Lake Station; and if desired by said party of the first part, to put said Cucumbers in Barrels and deliver at depot ready for shipping, at such time as said party of the first part may indicate.

Said party of the first part does hereby agree to receive, when delivered by said party of the second part, at the above-mentioned price, all the Cucumbers grown on the above mentioned Six Acres that are of suitable size and quality for Canning

And the said party of the first part agrees to make settlement with said party of the second part on the 1st of each calendar month following the date of the agreement, payments to be made on and after 15th of each month, and upon each settlement to pay the said party of the second part for all produce delivered to said party of the first part during the month preceding such settlement, in manner following, to-wit: One-third in cash at the time of settlement; one-third by their promissory note, bearing 10 per cent. interest, and payable on the 15th day of January next following the date of such settlement; and the remaining one third by his promissory note bearing ten per cent. interest, and payable on the 15th day of April next following the date of such settlement. And said party of the second part does hereby agree to take such promissory notes as above mentioned in payment for same.

WITNESS, our Hands and Seals, this 22 day of May 187[illegible] in the Town of Nunda County of McHenry and State of Illinois.

W. A. Cristy President {SEAL}

Alex J. Dike {SEAL}

The canneries would recommend the specific seed in their newspaper ads for contracted farmers, as well as where it could be purchased. The farmer was responsible for the initial cash outlay for seed stock. A typical arrangement would involve the farmer "subscribing" to the pickle firm or cannery by investing a sum of money in order to become a member of the grower's cooperative. In addition to providing the company an influx of cash at the beginning of the season to fund the operation, the arrangement also ensured growers a guaranteed place to have their crops accepted and processed for sale. Once the crop was converted into pickled or preserved goods and sold on the open market, the farmer then received a "pickle check" at the close of the season (typically September).

In the case of tomatoes, farmers often pursued the fresh market in Chicago for several weeks at the opening of the season when their crop ripened. After a few week's time, a glut of fresh produce would flood the market, at which time farmers would look to the local pickle firms and canneries to add value to the harvest and provide a ready market for what county farmers produced.

The great success of the earliest pickle companies and canneries inspired many other entrepreneurs in the county to follow suit. Pickle factories sprang up in Woodstock, Harvard, Marengo, Union, and other towns throughout the county. At the height of the craze, there were more than a dozen pickle stations in McHenry County – to say nothing of the facilities and canneries in the surrounding areas of northern Illinois.

As with all booms, they more often than not are

Continued on page 7

Continued from page 4

were thrilled that they would not have to haul their crops and stock to Richmond – more than 5 miles to the northwest. Since the new railroad would connect directly to Chicago, newly developing dairy farmers would be able to easily access profitable markets as other localities with railroads were doing.

For years, Solon's farmers and business interests had watched the village of Richmond grow based on the fact that that community was well served by the Chicago and North Western Railroad which had built through that community as early as 1854. That line was extended to Lake Geneva, Wis. in 1871.

Lake Geneva's leadership hoped that they could entice a second railroad to their community which would terminate directly in Chicago instead of having to reach that city via Algonquin and Elgin. To that end, they proposed the construction of the "Chicago and Northern Pacific Railroad." Money was raised in 1872 and the rumors seemed to be confirmed with a printed right-of-way through Solon Mills in the 1872 "New Combination Atlas of McHenry County," published by Everts, Baskin and Stewart.

Construction crews were hired and work on clearing out a right-of-way actually began. Paul Behrens writes in his book, "Steam Trains to Geneva Lake" (page 38) that optimism ran high in that spring of 1874 – even in the face of a severe economic downturn that had overtaken the country the previous fall, creating hardships which would last nearly to the end of the decade. Great things were forecast for the Air Line under what was being called its "present managers."

But nothing happened.

The hope of Solon Mills residents were dashed quite cruelly. A quiet bucolic stagnation slowly enveloped the little community. Finally, in 1901, Solon Mills' dream a railroad materialized. The management of the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad (the noted "Milwaukee Road") decided that there was enough traffic from its yard and roundhouse in Janesville, Wis. to make a direct line to Chicago necessary instead of funneling traffic all the way east to Sturdivant, Wis. en route to Chicago. The old Chicago and Northern Pacific right-of-way survey was utilized through McHenry County, and the line from Roundout through Libertyville to Janesville opened that year.

By 1903, two local passenger trains stopped at the new Solon Mills train station – one in the morning and one in the evening. But it was too late for the railroad to bring the hoped-for prosperity to Solon Mills.

Sensing that the local dairy farmers would be happy to have a production dairy close to their farms and a quicker

In the 19th century all that was needed for a village to form was a stream of water which would power a mill and a school and church. That was true of the little village of Solon Mills in northeastern McHenry County. In this 1906 postcard view, we see the school (left) and church in the village. The Nippersink Creek, off to the right of the photo, was dammed in 1837 to power the county's first grist mill. The school was probably built some time in the early 1850s and may have been modified in the 1880s. It was replaced about 1919 with a brick school building which served students until 1961. The brick building still survives, although not as a school. The church was a Methodist church built before 1872 as seen in an 1872 plat map of the community. The church is gone but a small cemetery which was next to the church remains. Although a railroad finally came through the community in 1901, the 1854 rail line through Richmond had taken hold by then. It meant that Solon Mills would never truly flourish.

Continued on page 7

Continued from page 5

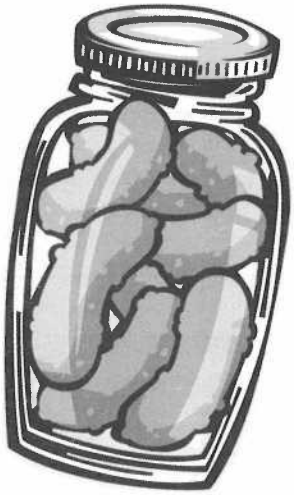
followed by busts. By the mid-1930s the heyday was coming to a close. A variety of factors were behind the demise of the McHenry County pickle industry, including a glut of product on the market, loss of profit due to aggressive competition, the industrialization of agriculture and food processing, and changing tastes.

An article in the *Crystal Lake Herald* Centennial edition on July 1, 1974, minced no words about attributing the market failure to a glut of pickles for sale.

"Contributing to the failure of the business was the fact that the other towns in the vicinity of Crystal Lake saw the seeming success of the plant here that they formed, built factories and stations, notably Woodstock, McHenry, Cary, Marengo and other places until at one time there were 13 pickle stations and factories in McHenry County. They produced so many pickles that they were forced to sell them below cost. Some of them carried over two or three years. A good many of these firms failed and carried the Crystal Lake Pickling & Preserving Co. down with them."

It's hard to argue with simple economics.

However, things have a way of coming full circle. Not all of the original factories failed. Most of us will recognize, and maybe even purchase, Claussen Pickles. Claussen got its start as a small family enterprise run by R. W. Stafford of Chicago. In 1914, Claussen & Sons purchased the concern, and moved their main production facility in the 1970s to the defunct Borden dairy plant on Route 14 in Woodstock. Now owned by Kraft Foods, Claussen has become a household name across the country. Today, Kraft operates a single production facility in Woodstock that supplies all the pickles for the brand.



Family-owned artisanal pickle makers are coming back onto the scene, as well. In 2011 Matt Sommerfield opened Sommerfield's Pickles in Crystal Lake. Sommerfield produces two varieties of cucumber pickle – garlic dill and "spicy" – and they can be found at select local retailers within the county. While the times have changed with agriculture and food production in McHenry County, the spirit of the pickle enterprise lives on. ◆

Continued from page 6

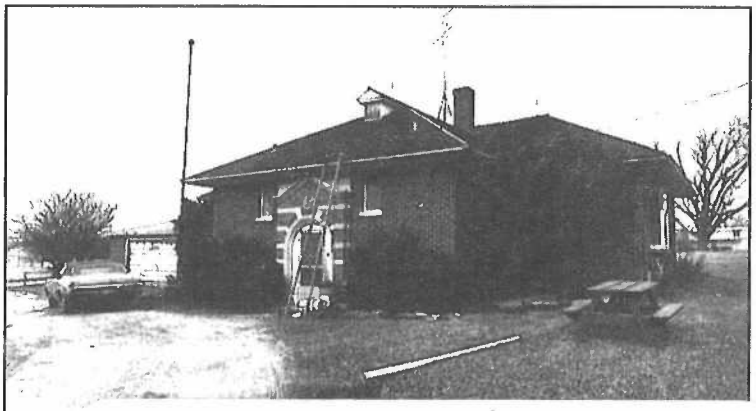
rail route to Chicago than the Richmond line could provide, in 1904 George and James Weiland built a large dairy processing plant in nearby Spring Grove. The business was very successful and siphoned rail-dependent businesses away from Solon Mills. The authors of the 1922 "History of McHenry County" dismissed any chance for industrial prosperity in Solon Mills.

Original mill properties which gave Solon Mills its name had become "entangled in endless litigation and [were] of little value to the community. The old mill still stands [as] a monument to legal folly and poor business judgment. ... With the failure of the milling interests, and the springing up of other villages nearby, Solon has never taken on much commercial importance."

By the 1950s, passenger trains no longer stopped at Solon Mills and the community's station was sold. In 1958 the station was removed from railroad property and moved to a spot near the northeast corner of Routes 12 and 31, where it serves today as the Depot Restaurant. From January 1985 no trains at all ran through Solon Mills, or anywhere between Libertyville and Janesville, and the line was dormant until 1990 when the Wisconsin and Southern Railroad leased the line from the State of Wisconsin and began running a nightly long freight train to and from Chicago.

Those trains still polish the rails through Solon Mills but do not stop. Even the Solon Mills post office closed in 2002.

Only a few remnants of the original Solon Mills settlement remain. The Nippersink Creek still flows easterly along the south side of the village but not in it's original channel. The original Gardner/White mill's spillway has become the new channel.



Solon Mills District 33 school boasted an enrollment of 32 students in 1898. It was located on the northeast corner of Mill and North streets. It as replaced by brick school (pictured) in 1919, about 100 feet east of its original location. The building still stands.

On the site of the original log schoolhouse of the 1850s, a "modern" brick school was erected in 1919. It closed in 1961 but is happily preserved as one of several family homes that fill the old village today.

The original Methodist Episcopal Church, erected in late 1873 just to the west of the still existing North Solon Cemetery, no longer exists. Two large, ungainly metal buildings stand to the north and west of the cemetery.

Today, except for the sounds of almost continuous auto and truck traffic humming along Route 12 and the nightly honking of a diesel horn at the head of a long freight train passing along the north end of the village, a sense of pleasant tranquility has descended on this lovely place. ◆

McHenry County Historical Society
Annual Treasurer's Report
2017-2018

INVESTMENTS

Annually the Finance committee meets with representatives from Northern Trust to review the Society's investments. They shared that as of May 31, 2018, twelve month returns for the MCHS Endowment Fund was a net return of 10.34% and the McEachren Charitable Trust was a net return of 9.96%. The Glenn and Norma and Anderson Fund saw a net return of 6.53%. No monthly distributions are being taken from the Anderson fund. Monies will be used from this fund for the new exhibit space in Eckhart Hall and improvements in the textile area. Northern Trust continues to be the society's investment firm. Our investment strategy for all three funds is Growth with Moderate Income.

STATEMENT OF REVENUES & EXPENDITURES

Attached you will find pie charts which give you a financial overview of MCHS activities for our fiscal year ending June 30, 2018. The figures are unaudited. Our annual audit will be finished at the end of October.

NEW BUDGET FOR FISCAL YEAR 2018-2019

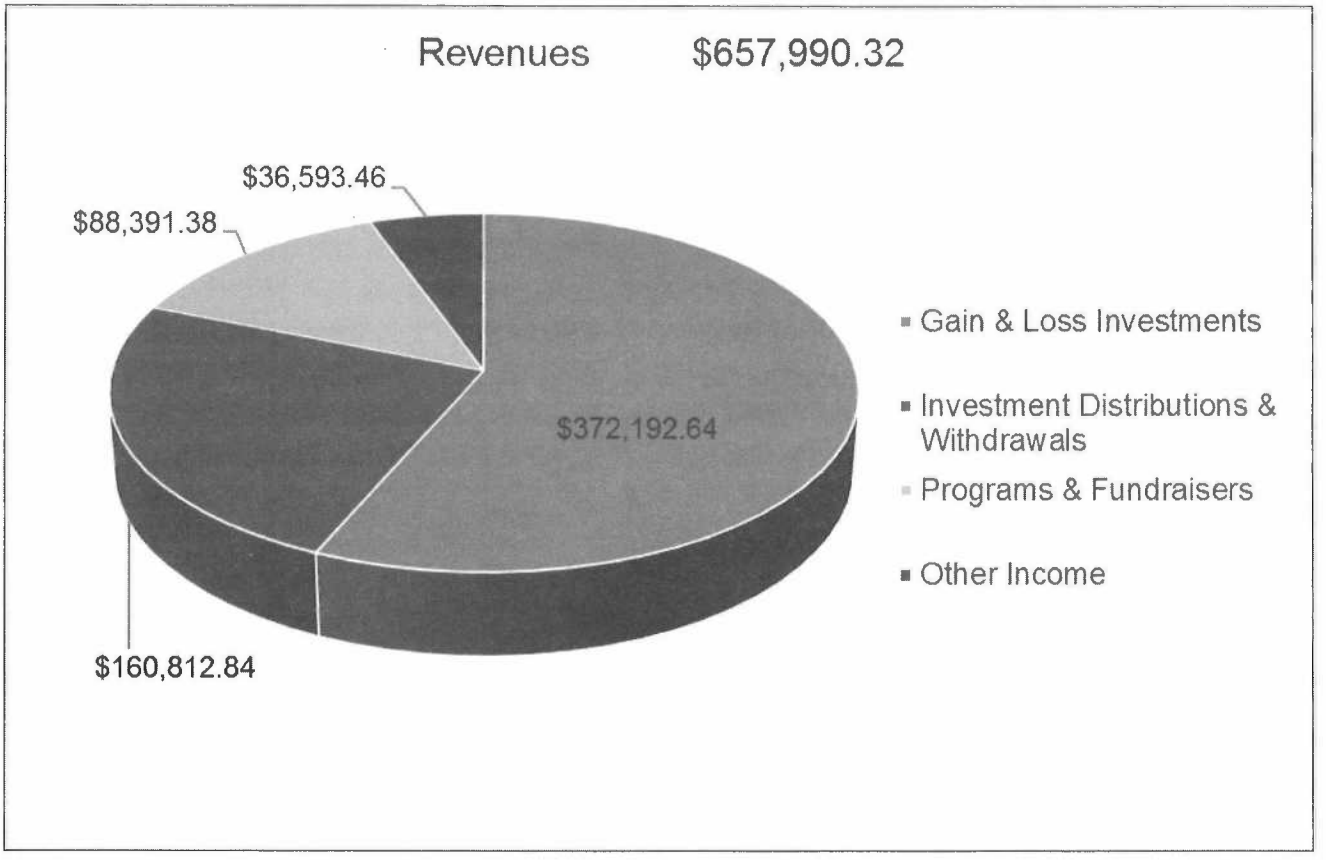
The budget for this coming fiscal year reflects an income of $331,584 and expenditures of $329,802. This budget reflects an addition of a fourth full time position that will focus on education programs in addition to maintaining membership and volunteer coordination. In addition the budget reflects an increase draw from the McEachren Charitable Trust from 3.5% to 4.5%. Total revenue from our endowments will be $238,109. Attached is the budget overview for FY 2018-2019.

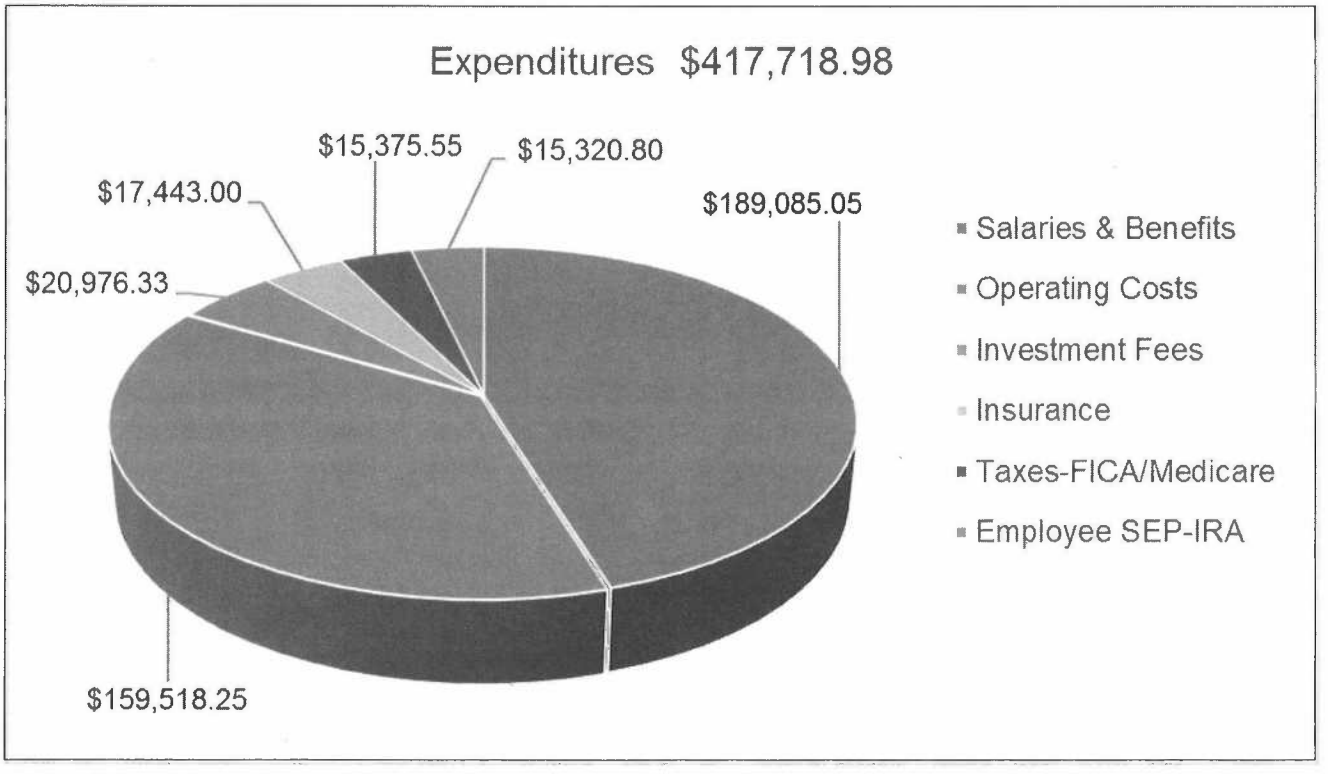
I would like to thank our members for their continued support. Whether it's your donation to the Utility Fund, membership, or quilt raffle, it all contributes to the success of the Society in meeting our mission: We engage and educate current and future generations by sharing and preserving McHenry County History.

Submitted by:

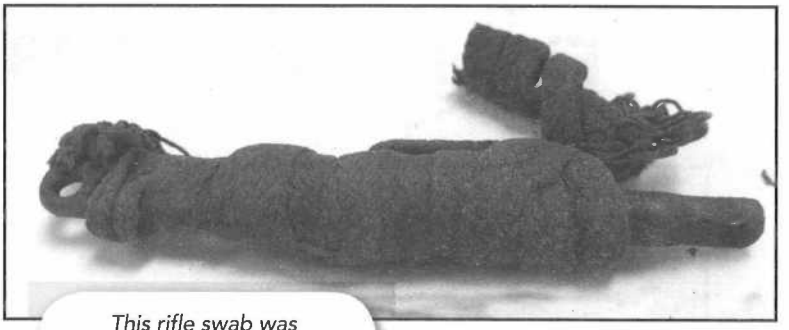
Molly Walsh, Treasurer

McHenry County Historical Society & Museum
Fiscal Year 2017-18 ending June 30





Pockets packed with precious property



This rifle swab was disguised inside a shoelace.

By EMILY DATTILO
Collections Assistant

We all tend to leave things in the pockets and then forget about them for a while.

Sometimes those things end up going through the wash, or we're lucky enough to rediscover the forgotten items before too long (or before laundry day). It turns out that some donors forgot to empty the pockets of clothing donated to the McHenry County Historical Society.

Every time I come across a piece of clothing with pockets, I check just to make sure the former owner didn't leave something behind. Most of the time, if I find anything at all, I find tissues (I don't stop to check if they're used and I prefer to keep it that way) or an occasional shopping receipt if the garment is more modern. But sometimes, underneath the wad of tissues, I find things worth noting.

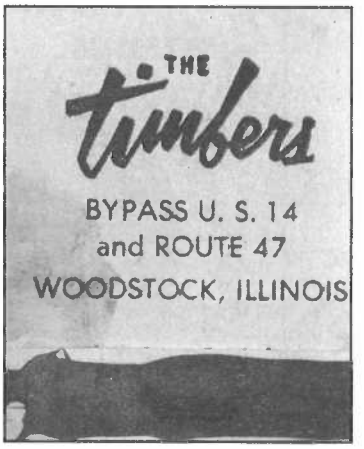
One of those surprises was a purple ring box in a wedding dress originally worn in 1883. The ring wasn't in the box anymore (and I'd like to think that's because the bride wore it or passed it on to a descendant), but it seems reasonable to assume that it once held her wedding ring. How it got into the pocket of the wedding dress, or why it was still there 135 years after the wedding took place is anybody's guess.

Whatever the reason, finding this little box was a nice surprise.

A Veterans of Foreign Wars uniform contained a treasure trove inside the pockets! There was a copy of the wearer's discharge papers, a newspaper article, a sheet of biographical information, a poem or prayer, an American Legion memorial poppy, and a Band-Aid (still in its wrapper). The donors likely put the papers in there, although I suspect the poppy and Band-Aid are from the original wearer, a man named Clarence Buesing. Clarence served in Italy during World War II, and, as the uniform shows, joined his local VFW post upon returning to McHenry County. According to the newspaper clipping he later served as Commander of that VFW post.

While working on this otherwise ordinary World War I uniform, I pulled out a small bronze bar with holes on each end and a shoelace tied at the holes and wrapped around the entire bar. Turns out it was a rifle swab. The soldier would have attached a cloth to the brass bar, dropped it down the rifle barrel, and pulled it back up to clean it.

The founder of MCHS, Dorothy McEachren, donated several of her coats to the collection, and she almost always left something in her coat pockets. There were lots of tissues in most pockets, but in one coat I also found a pack of matches. As you can see, these matches were from a restaurant called The Timbers in Woodstock. I haven't been able to find much information on the restaurant because it no longer exists but in the fall I chatted with an MCHS volunteer and she said that it used to be a popular, upscale restaurant and banquet hall in the area. Now a car dealer, Kunz Country Auto Group, operates on the northeast corner of Routes 14 and 47.



[Editor's Note: The Timbers, a supper club-type restaurant known for its Friday fish fries and dancing on Saturday nights, was owned by Frank and Mary Ann Mass from 1964 to 1986.]

In another one of Dorothy's coats I found a plastic rain bonnet in its case, which was a promotional piece for Sen. Everett McKinley Dirksen. Dirksen was an important Illinois politician from the 1930s through the 1960s. This means that he was a politician during the Great Depression, World War II, the early part of the Cold War, the Civil Rights Movement, and part of the Vietnam War. And those are just the really big moments during this time in U.S. history. (What a time to be a politician!)

Dirksen served as U.S. Senate Minority Leader, the position noted on the rain bonnet case, throughout the 1960s and so I can safely date this piece to that time. One might reasonably think the raincoat was of similar age, but NO!! With the broad shoulders, cinched waist, and clear hourglass shape, this coat

Continued on page 12

Henry Kenyon is a "can-do" volunteer

Henry "Hank" Kenyon III is living proof that an active mind can keep one young.

He insists, "There are weeks when I have nothing to do." Don't believe him. This gentle man frequently burns the candle at both ends ... and in the middle, too ... heading off to one board meeting or another.

Lately, his attention has been focused on preserving the Yerkes Observatory in Williams Bay. Built in 1897, the University of Chicago-owned observatory boasts a 90-foot dome and its 40-inch refractor telescope creates a picturesque scene on 77 acres within a stone's throw of Geneva Lake. The university has announced it will shutter the observatory on Oct. 1. That has sent shockwaves through Williams Bay – a lakefront community that has seen its population blossom from just over 700 people in 1940 to 2,400 today.

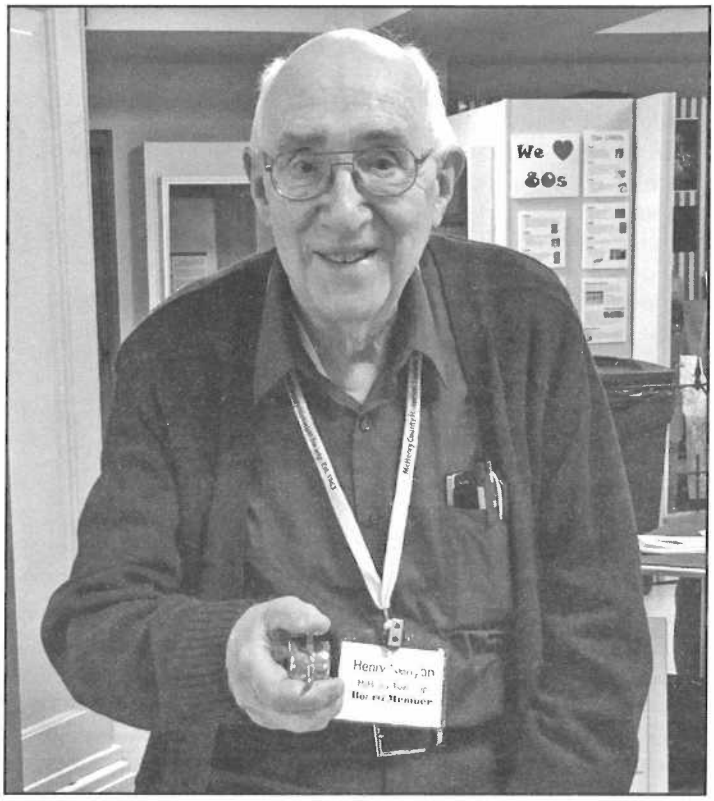
Born to Henry and Mildred Kenyon, "Little Hank" was the son of a Genoa City, Wis. farm girl and the owner of a Williams Bay trucking company. He had one older brother, Robert, and a sister of sorts – a cousin, Delores, who lived with the family. Both have since died.

He is dedicated to a fault and more loyal than a Swiss Guardsman. We at the McHenry County Historical Society can always count on Henry to keep his promises and step up in a pinch. And this passion is rooted in a love of community and for local history.

"I've always liked history, since I was a kid," he said. "It was the excitement about reading how the world was formed and everything that happened.

"I know things about people that no one else knows – who they were, what they did. Still, every day I learn something I didn't know."

– Kurt Begalka



NAME: Henry Kenyon
AGE: 83
TOWN WHERE I LIVE NOW: McHenry
HOMETOWN: Williams Bay, Wis.
FAMILY (spouse/children): Seven children: Larry, John (McHenry), Marybeth, Ann, Christina, Don and Matt; 14 grandchildren.
EDUCATION: Bachelor's degree in education and minor in library science, University of Wisconsin – Whitewater; master's degree in education, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb.
FAVORITE MOVIE: Left Hand of God
LAST CD BOUGHT: Maureen Christine
THIN CRUST OR DEEP-DISH PIZZA? Thin
KETCHUP OR MUSTARD ON A HOT DOG: Mustard
PEPSI OR PERRIER: Pepsi
FUNNY/INTERESTING THING PEOPLE TYPICALLY DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU: Even after all my years of teaching... I still get nervous speaking to a group of adults.

TRACER: How long have you been a volunteer with the McHenry County Historical Society?
KENYON: Five or six years.

TRACER: What other organizations do you volunteer for and in what capacities?
KENYON: McHenry County Retired Teachers Association – historian for more than 23 years; Williams Bay Historical Society board vice president; member of the Walworth County Historical Society, Big Foot/Walworth Historical Society, Whitewater Wisconsin Indian Mound Preservation Group - newsletter committee, and the Wisconsin Archeological Society.

TRACER: What prompted you to choose this organization?
KENYON: As you can see, my lifelong interest in history and the fact that now I had the time to make a commitment to volunteer.

TRACER: What sort of things do you do here?
KENYON: I research history-related questions MCHS receives; serves. I also volunteer as a docent for visiting school groups. I also serve on the board of directors and on its library and education committees. My aunt was a former teacher who worked at the library in Williams Bay. Back when I was in fourth grade I used go there and help her. I set up the library in college at Whitewater.

TRACER: What is the best part of volunteering at the museum?
KENYON: Having a part in keeping history alive and available to all.

TRACER: What do you do for a living? (If retired, explain your former occupation)
KENYON: I taught sixth grade and served (about half and

Continued on page 12

Continued from page 2

elements requiring improvement. Areas needing improvement will be shared with the relevant board committees which then will begin working to reach these standards during the 2018-19 fiscal year.

Some common themes that the StEPs process allowed us to identify were: creating a strategic plan, using surveys or focus groups to help inform the board/staff what our stakeholders expect from us, and developing a facilities management plan, inclusive of disaster planning. The board looks forward to engaging our membership as it works toward accomplishing these goals.

In closing, I would like to thank Bob Frenz who served as vice president for the past two years. His counsel has been tremendous. I also would like to recognize outgoing board member Greg Barry. Greg served on the board for the past six years and generously gave his legal counsel to MCHS. My thanks to the board for your continued work and dedication to MCHS, your investment in the organization is deeply appreciated.

The board and staff would like to recognize those members who have passed. Their influence and passion helped make MCHS the organization you see today. For a memorial list, please see the administrator's report.

And finally, the board thanks our staff. This past year has witnessed tremendous change. It would not have been possible without each of your contributions.

This past year laid the groundwork, which I believe will lead to exciting new changes for the McHenry County Historical Society and Museum. We invite you to be a part of it. After all, as our new vision states, we pride ourselves in:

acccessibilit**Y**
innO**V**ation
incl**U**sion
Relevancy
outreac**H**
leadersh**I**p
su**S**tainability
s**T**ewardship
kn**O**wledge
collabo**R**ation
integrit**Y**

~ With gratitude,
Mary K. Ott, president

Continued from page 10

more closely matches the styles of the 1940s through the '50s than the straight, tubular styles popular throughout the 1960s.

During the 1950s and '60s more and more raincoats (along with textiles in general) were made of synthetic fabrics or a blend of natural and synthetic fabrics. Dorothy's raincoat is made of gabardine, which was a type of waterproof fabric more common in the 1940s and 1950s. All things considered, it seems that Dorothy got at least 10 years of use out of this raincoat before donating it to MCHS. But before we label her as stylistically outdated, remember that coat styles didn't change as radically as other outerwear styles, like dresses, and so it would certainly be possible to wear a coat for a number of years before becoming offensively unfashionable.

One of the more common items I've found in coat pockets are buttons that have fallen off the garment in the past. In one uncommon instance I found a couple of large plastic buttons in the process of degrading. How did I know it was degrading plastic and not just cracked or worn plastic? When I first looked at the coat I noticed some solid white droplets around the buttonholes, but the buttons were missing. It didn't really look like mold, but that was my best guess to explain the mysterious residue.

Then I checked the pockets.

I pulled out two large orange plastic buttons from one of the pockets. They were faded, a little cracked, and kind of bumpy all over. I opened the coat, and saw an odd bleached spot on the interior, right about where the pocket was. That's when I realized that the residue was definitely not a sort of weird mold, and the buttons were more than just worn. The gasses from the degrading plastic buttons leached through the pocket material, a layer of flannel, AND the satin lining to bleach the coat interior. The degrading process is also what made the buttons look bumpy and formed the plastic residue around the buttonholes.

If nothing else, the experience confirmed that plastic is a very scary material. ◆

• Emily Dattilo is a former collections assistant at the McHenry County Historical Society & Museum. She now works as a museum educator at Naper Settlement in Naperville.

Continued from page 11

half) as learning center director for 37 years at McHenry Middle School and Parkland Middle School in McHenry District 15. From 1991 to 2011, I was the genealogy and history reference librarian for the McHenry Public Library. (where he still volunteers.) I also spent 25 years working as a leader and unit commissioner with the Boy Scouts in McHenry County's Kishwaukee District.

TRACER: How did you get to where you are today?
KENYON: By following the path of what I love doing and keeping on the path no matter what it took or where it led me.

TRACER: Do you have a mentor? If so, who, and describe how he/she influenced you.
KENYON: Yes. Ruth Bergstrom was my high school English and typing teacher. She encouraged me to attend college and she assured me I was capable of succeeding there.

TRACER: Do you have a favorite memory of a great day at the Historical Society?
KENYON: One of the first times I helped a visitor in our research library, we were able to find just what they wanted and needed. ◆

Administrator's Annual Report – 2018

Since we last met, the board has been busy getting itself better acquainted with who we are and what we hope to become. We have supplemented our mission …

We engage and educate current and future generations by preserving and sharing McHenry County history.

with a vision …

The McHenry County Historical Society & Museum endeavors to be a hub for collection, preservation and educational outreach reflecting McHenry County's history.

and a set of values …

Accessibility, Collaboration, Inclusion, Innovation, Integrity, Knowledge, Leadership, Outreach, Relevancy, Stewardship and Sustainability.

There is an old adage that says you've got to know where you've been and where you are in order to determine where you are going. After nearly 55 years, I think we're getting a bead on it.

This year, perhaps more than ever before has featured many moving pieces … literally. We moved more than 50 artifacts out of Eckert Hall and the Schuette building into temporary storage, freeing up space and putting artifacts that were subject to heat and humidity into a more archivally sound environment.

Volunteers also helped move items out a of stage storage area that had remained untouched for some 30 years. Some of these items, as well as undocumented items from the museum basement later were sold at three successful Flash Sales organized by Nancy Roozée.

1 Preservation

• Our digitization of the Richmond Gazette/Nu Vue News has been supplemented by the addition of issues of the McHenry Plaindealer and McHenry Star … and soon Marengo papers. MCHS, supplemented by funding from the Marengo-Union Library District, the McHenry County Illinois Genealogical Society, McHenry Area Public Library, Marengo Society for Historic Preservation, Marengo Woman's Club and Union Lions and Lioness clubs – is in the midst of digitizing issues of Marengo Republican, Marengo News, Republican News, Marengo Journal and Union News.

Genealogists have identified the Marengo papers as among the hardest to access … up until now. They will join the existing high-resolution, searchable database already available on our website. Special thanks to Arlyn Booth and Maggie Crane, the Library Committee members who are spearheading this project.

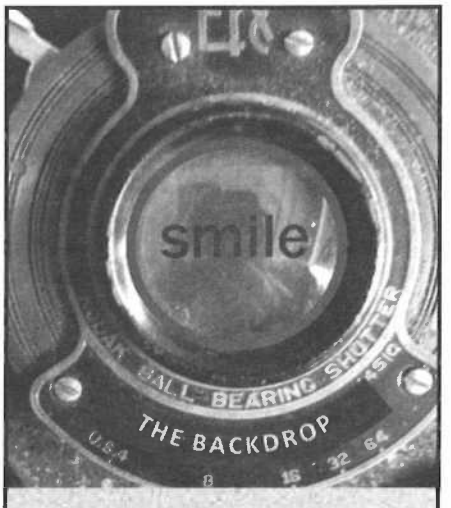
• Pringle School fundraising efforts last year enabled us to hire consultant Beth Baranski of Baranski Hammer Moretta & Sheehy Architects & Planners in Galena to analyze and evaluate the 1867 school. The result was a carefully honed to-do list on the building and a blueprint for restoration of the interior restrooms and foyer. We also learned that school is substantial enough to merit inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places. That paperwork will be submitted once some minor improvements to the interior are completed this summer.

• We completed a mortar analysis of Pringle School and of the 1870 Union School building that houses our offices.

• Plans are underway to stabilize the 1898 Riley Methodist Church to prevent the north and south walls from bowing outward near the roofline.

• We continued to make progress with out textile collection. With the help of Collections Assistant Emily Dattilo, we now have an estimated 95 percent of the museum's textile collection updated, documented and added to our digital inventory. Many textiles were among 645 items de-accessioned from our collection this past year because of condition issues, duplication or their irrelevance to our mission. But we added 365 items into the collection. Examples include: A collection of Hebron downtown photographs from the 1920s, a four-patch & Monkey Wrench quilt from early 1900s, a Gannon family Bible, a 1920s phonograph manufactured by Everett Hunter Boat Co. of McHenry, a Walkup family dresser & china cabinet from the 1840s and architectural salvage pieces from the Alden train depot.

I'm also happy to report that all five artifacts that were part of this year's Adopt-An-Artifact initiative were adopted. Special thanks to the family of Rita Garcia, Grace Moline, the McHenry County Civil War Roundtable, Bruce and Mary Ott, and the Marengo Society for Historic Preservation who stepped up to underwrite this important conservation work.



the backdrop
106 Cass Street
Woodstock, IL
815•338•3007

Continued on page 14

Continued from page 13

2 Programming

• Our two major festivals (Heritage Fair and Cider Fest), as well as our Antique Appraisal Event continue to garner increased attention and revenue. This spring's Sampler Lecture Series also proved very popular – to the point where we were forced to lock the doors for the Edmund Fitzgerald program because we were at capacity.

• We added additional museum visiting hours for the remainder of the year and are working to boost educational offerings in the classroom. Our team participated in this year' Ag Day program at the fairgrounds and the McHenry County Farm Bureau's Summer Ag Institute – two opportunities to connect with local elementary teachers.

3 Finances

• Our Northern Trust accounts continue to grow, and thus far have kept pace with additional financial demands as we tackle additional staff, equipment and building repair needs.

• Membership initiatives have resulted in new governmental members.

4 Administration

• I want to make a point of thanking my board for its ongoing commitment to this organization as it continues to evolve and position itself to be a change agent in the future. Saddled with so many tasks before us, it is easy to overlook all that we've done in the past. Thank you for stepping up and making a difference.

• No report would be complete without acknowledging my extraordinary staff. Their passion for history and dedication to making this organization the best it can be is awe-inspiring. Consider yourselves very lucky to have Nancy Roozée and Kira Halvey working on your behalf.

I know I am grateful.

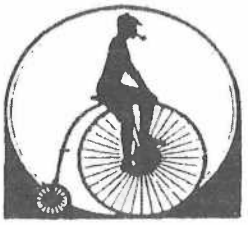
Along those lines, it is with regret that I announce the resignation of Membership/Volunteer Coordinator Kim Ortega. She is leaving us to take a full-time position with Midway Village in Rockford. During her two years at MCHS she has worked hard to streamline and update our membership procedures, improve our educational outreach and recruit new volunteers. She will be missed.

~ Kurt Begalka

Finally, please join me in a moment of silence for those volunteers who died in the past year.
Marie Coleman, Alice Colver, Norm Crosswell, Herb Falk, Ken Fiske, Rita Garcia, Evelyn Hart, Annie Holsten, Jim Keefe, Mary Ann Mass, Richard Mikyska, Larry Phalin, Tony Wells, Charles Zimmerman.

They will be missed.

Iron Horse Estate Sales
Antiques & Appraisers
130+Years of Combined Experience
Serving McHenry County for 4 Decades
Call for Free Consultation
815.575.1720 Estate Sales: Stacy McArdle
815.575.1272 Antiques & Appraisals: Debbie & Jim McArdle



MEMORY TRAIL RESEARCH
8612 Memory Trail
Wonder Lake, Illinois 60097
(815) 653-9459
Craig Pfannkuche
craig@pfannkuche.com

Purveyors of print–
supporting the McHenry County Historical Society

COPY EXPRESS
Print • Copy • Design • Promote

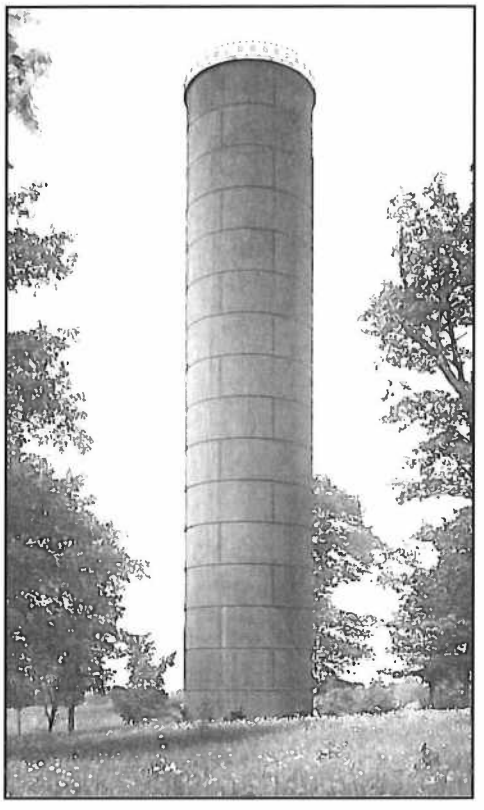
(815) 338-7161
www.copyexpressyes.com

David Krieg
Auctioneer

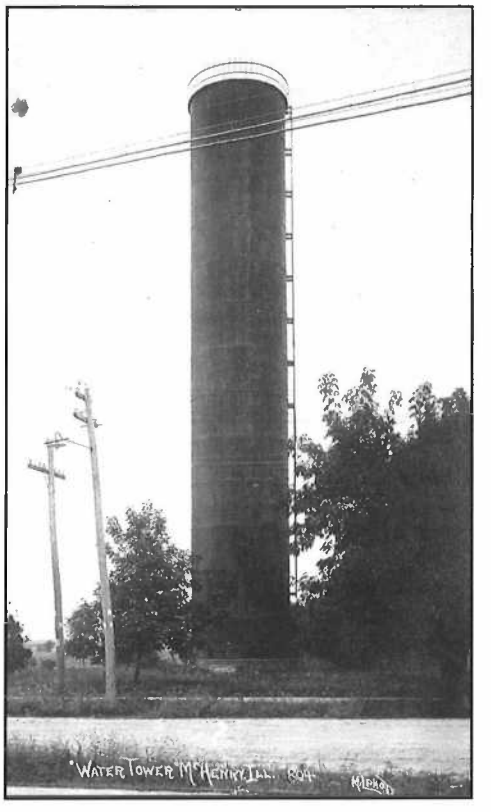
Toys • Household • Antiques
Toy Consultant
Farm Toys • Cars • Trucks
Construction Toys
Description & Pricing Available

Harvard, IL 815-943-5310

Summer Mystery Photo



This water tower was located in Tourist Park, on the southwest corner of Hill and Jackson streets in Woodstock. It most likely was built between 1892 and 1895. Specifics on the tower's size and dimensions are not available. But a similar, historically significant "standpipe" in Petrolia, Canada, is 85 feet tall, 25 feet in diameter and held 257,700 gallons of water. Both were made of riveted, steel plates. At the time of its construction in 1896, Petrolia's town council did not think it could afford a roof for the structure but did commission the construction of an ornamental iron balcony at the top reached by a ladder. The Woodstock standpipe, which featured a similar iron ring at the top, also almost certainly featured graduated plates. They were thicker at the bottom, where the pressure would be greatest. Pat Wirtz of McHenry came precipitously close to getting the correct answer. But while he correctly identified the structure, he had the wrong location. Looking at the picture of the McHenry standpipe he provided, it is easy to see how one could make a mistake!



Autumn Mystery Photo

In a town with many iconic houses, this one can't help but draw your attention – over and over again. What is it and where is it located?

Tracer:

Quarterly Newsletter of the McHenry County Historical Society

An Illinois Not-for-profit Corporation

6422 Main Street, P.O. Box 434, Union, Illinois 60180
815-923-2267 Email: info@mchenrycountyhistory.org

Not-For-Profit
Corporation
U.S. Postage
PAID
Marengo, IL 60152
Permit No. 9

New at the Library...

- Aurora 'n' Elgin: Being a compendium of word and picture recalling the everyday operations of the Chicago and Elgin Railroad, by James D. Johnson. The Traction Orange Co., Wheaton, IL. Circa 1965.
- Index to Hartland Township Vital Records. Circa 1998. Includes confirmations, births, marriages and deaths.
- Barbara Miller Family photos, Robert and Anna. Circa 1920s.
- Bulletins from the First United Methodist Church, Woodstock. Dates in the collection range from 1924-2008; 1970-'80s.
- *Rail & Wire*, Illinois Railway Museum magazine, Summer 2018.
- *The U.S. Army: A Guide to Its Man and Equipment* (revised edition) by Fletcher Pratt. Whitman Publishing Co., Racine, Wis. Circa 1942-43.
- St. John's Evangical Lutheran Church membership directory, Woodstock, IL
- Family Bibles. From Airman Steven Allen Wilcox. Psalms and Proverbs.
- *Steps on the Stairway of Reflection.* A collection of poems by Margaret Jeanne Niensteadt, Crystal Lake.
- *Celebrate Illinois, 1818-2018: A Bicentennial Retrospective.* Magazine published by Shaw Media, St. Charles, IL. Circa 2018.
- *Comprehensive Immigration Policy* by Helen Anderson, May 27, 1927.
- *Highlights in the History of the Army Nurse Corps.* Edited by Carolyn M. Feller and Constance J. Moore. U.S. Army Center of Military History, Washington, D.C. Circa 1995.
- Abstract of Title: Thomas Hutchinson, Marengo [City], Marengo Township.
- American Legion Auxiliary – Crystal Lake, minutes from Sept. 3, 1965.
- McHenry County telephone books covering all of McHenry and Northern Kane counties.
- The Rose Farm photo album from Woodstock in Hartland Township, IL.